8: Bennett D-5 (ca. 1898) 1899 FH9 Fang FH9

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Conservatism.—The Fang are not quick to adopt reforms or to introduce new methods; they are more or less the slaves of custom, and have a superstitious dread of departing from ancestral habits. This refers to all the proceedings of life. Fang living in towns near Gaboon are almost daily coming in contact with white settlers, and to some extent, at least, appear to be changing their mode of living. It never appeared to me that a Fang had the same longing to be "just like a white man" as possesses the young Mpôngwe and Benga men.

IX.—*Ornamentation.*

The patterns mostly seen in Fang ornamentation consist of bands, incised lines, elliptical punch marks, herring bone, lozenge pattern and cross lines. The natives do not possess a natural aptitude for drawing, and seldom attempt it. The few drawings I have seen on the bark walls of houses, supposed to represent men and women, were very crude and exaggerated in proportion. They have no idea whatever of perspective. They seem to interpret foreign drawings very readily. The Fang show considerable skill in plain wood carving, using an ordinary native knife. I have noticed that their carving improves very considerably when an imported pocket knife is the instrument employed.

162 We have been able to define the characteristics of this demographic crisis, of which the Fang as a whole are aware. These are a drop in the population, which is more or less checked according to the region and circumstances; a lack of balance between the number of men and of women — the sex ratio rising rapidly at the level of the oldest age groups — and a more marked aging of the feminine population; an insufficient demographic basis and at the same time a high infant mortality. And it is
168 the lack of children and the sudden importance acquired by women
578 (conditioned by their number as well as by the general movement of social evolution) of which the villagers complain, far more than they criticize the inadequacy of sanitary equipment. In a society where the number [that is, the size of the groups] differentiates the groupings in a hierarchical system, and permits personal preeminence, the acute phases of this demographic crisis arouse great anxiety; the decline of fecundity in the women is one of the reasons, the most important one perhaps, for the hostility of the men toward the women.

168 The grounds given for such a situation [100] have a double aspect, modernist and traditionalist. The grounds of the former were displayed at the time of the Pahouin Congress of 1947 and also by certain groupings at the time of the movement for regrouping clans. They are expressed by definite claims, such as demanding a health program and education in hygiene, a desire to control and then limit prostitution, to consolidate the "family" by limiting divorce and curbing adultery, a need for rich crops "that can be sold in order to support the family," (1) etc. The grounds of the

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1. Statement by a Dignitary of the Yémödâg Tribe, Mitzic, 1949.

traditionalists without doubt compel recognition and represent the opinion of the greatest number. They reveal a strong reaction to the present state of Fang society and a desire to return to a past when everything was better, when there were "a great many men and a great many children"; they express a tendency toward "counter-acculturation." The upheavals that have occurred in

168 the social and cultural organizations are directly blamed: the
● 166 breaking up and dispersal of the groupings resulting in the rupture
of fundamental interdictions (especially that of exogamy: with the
[835] present confusion each man risks marrying his "sister" and being
condemned to a sterile union); the abandonment of traditional
religious observances, especially the Biéri worship rendered to
[769 ancestors — so that the Biéri "revenges" itself, "according to cer-
842] tain informants, by making the women sterile. Borrowing from
European civilization and from their neighbors has altered "Fang
manners" and resulted in behavior that is not valid for the Fang
and puts their social existence in danger. These are the principal
reasons brought forth. We have already in this chapter paid par-
ticular attention to these facts, because they show the subjective
aspect of the demographic crisis and how much the search for
fertility and for power, both linked together, still plays a part in
the present reactions of this people, how it takes effect in an
ambiguous manner by having recourse at the same time to modern
foreign methods and to traditional Fang methods. For the Fang
villagers the crisis is the most serious consequence of a situation
created by colonization — by "civilization," as some of them
curiously say. This is sufficient indication that these facts must
be integrated in the whole we have undertaken to analyze.

[101] III. The Type of Social Structure (1)

1. A study carried out with the help of documents collected especially among the Fang of the Woleu-N'Tem, and principally in Oyem region where Fang vitality is the most authentic.

Tribes, Clans, and Lineages

596 The recent clan renewal to which we have often referred has shown the still fundamental importance of the groupings established as a function of "kinship." This was immediately grasped by the first observers and administrators of the Fang country, who insisted on the "family" nature of the Pahouin groupings and came to the

8: Bennett D-5 (ca. 1898) 1899 FH9 Fang FH9

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